

Washington Park Arboretum

BULLETIN



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Washington Park Arboretum Bulletin
Published quarterly by the Arboretum Foundation
for the Washington Park Arboretum

— Washington Park Arboretum —

The Arboretum is a 230-acre living museum displaying internationally renowned collections of oaks, conifers, camellias, Japanese maples, hollies and a profusion of woody plants from the Pacific Northwest and around the world. Aesthetic enjoyment gracefully co-exists with science in this spectacular urban green space on the shores of Lake Washington. Visitors come to learn, explore, relax or reflect in Seattle's largest public garden.

The Washington Park Arboretum is managed cooperatively by the University of Washington and Seattle Parks and Recreation; the Arboretum Foundation is its major support organization.

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Open 10 AM—4 PM daily;
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Closed Thanksgiving and the Friday after,
Christmas and New Year's Day.

The Arboretum is accessible by Metro bus #43 from downtown Seattle and the University of Washington campus

— Arboretum Foundation —

The Arboretum Foundation is a nonprofit organization established in 1935 to ensure stewardship for the Washington Park Arboretum and to provide horticultural leadership for the region. The Foundation provides funding, volunteer services, membership programs and public information in support of the Arboretum, its plant collections and programs. Volunteers operate the gift shop, conduct major fund-raising events, and further their gardening knowledge through study groups and hands-on work in the greenhouse or grounds.

2300 Arboretum Drive East, Seattle, WA 98112
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Washington Park Arboretum

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ON THE COVER: *Rhododendron occidentale*, the Western azalea, is native to southern Oregon and is much admired in Brookings, Oregon's 36-acre Azalea City Park, especially during its Azalea Festival, held each year over Memorial Day weekend. Fine specimens may also be visited at the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden and in the Arboretum at grid coordinates 13-3E, 16-3E, 16-4E, 32-2W, 35-2W & 37-1W.

ABOVE: Hybridized by Ned Brockenbrough, *Rhododendron 'Nancy Evans'* has orange buds, which open to amber-yellow, funnel-shaped flowers, and medium-green foliage, colored bronze when new. This compact shrub grows to about 3 feet in 10 years and may be seen at Arboretum grid coordinate 27-B.

Springtime Splendor!



Spring is an exciting time in the Pacific Northwest. At the Arboretum, we began the season in earnest with the building of a garden for the Northwest Flower & Garden Show and by hosting our annual fundraiser, the Preview Gala. Volunteers and staff who worked on both the display garden and the gala spent countless hours in preparation. Students from the University of Washington Department of Landscape Architecture under the tutelage of Professor Iain Robertson, designed a garden depicting plant communities of the world within the shelter of the Arboretum. Construction and teardown of the garden required considerable teamwork by volunteers and staff members of the Foundation, the University of Washington's Arboretum collections crew and the Seattle Parks and Recreation crew. We are grateful to everyone who participated! The display garden was awarded a silver medal and the Pacific Horticulture magazine award, both wonderful honors.

The gala, held amidst the garden show's

Although azaleas were originally thought to be a separate genus, they are now recognized as belonging to several subgenera of the genus *Rhododendron*. The Arboretum's Azalea Way, designed by James Dawson and originally planted in the 1930s, is a three-quarter mile celebration of their beauty.

extraordinary gardens, felt like a stroll through an enchanted park. The silent auction with its travel packages, plants and gardening items, only whetted the appetite for more spring gardening adventures. And, as we think about plants and flowers and gardens, our minds turn naturally to early bloomers and spring plant sales and to rainy days filled by book sale treasures.

Yes, that is a lot of excitement! But spring activity around the Arboretum is just beginning. The implementation plan for the master plan has been approved and the first project identified: "South End-Madrona Terrace." Early work includes a survey and topographical detail of the approximately 10-acre site. An engineering team soon will determine where three new irrigation mainlines will be installed. In addition, the University's Arboretum collections crew is mapping important collection items as well as native trees and shrubs. The scope of work for the design of this southern entry into the Arboretum has been written, and designers will soon be sought.

On a final note, the Arboretum Foundation was named as the recipient of a \$150,000 bequest from a former employee. We are grateful that she chose to contribute to the Arboretum Foundation in a way that will benefit so many of our programs. If you are interested in providing for the Arboretum's future in this manner, I will be happy to discuss it with you at any time.

Come visit the Arboretum and spend some time in our springtime splendor!

The signature of Deborah Andrews, written in cursive black ink.

Deborah Andrews, Executive Director,
Arboretum Foundation

COMBINATIONS UNLOCKED

The Whys & Wherefores of Favorite Plant Combinations

7: Favorite Spring Ephemerals—Yellow & A Bit of Blue

STORY & PHOTOGRAPH BY MARTY WINGATE



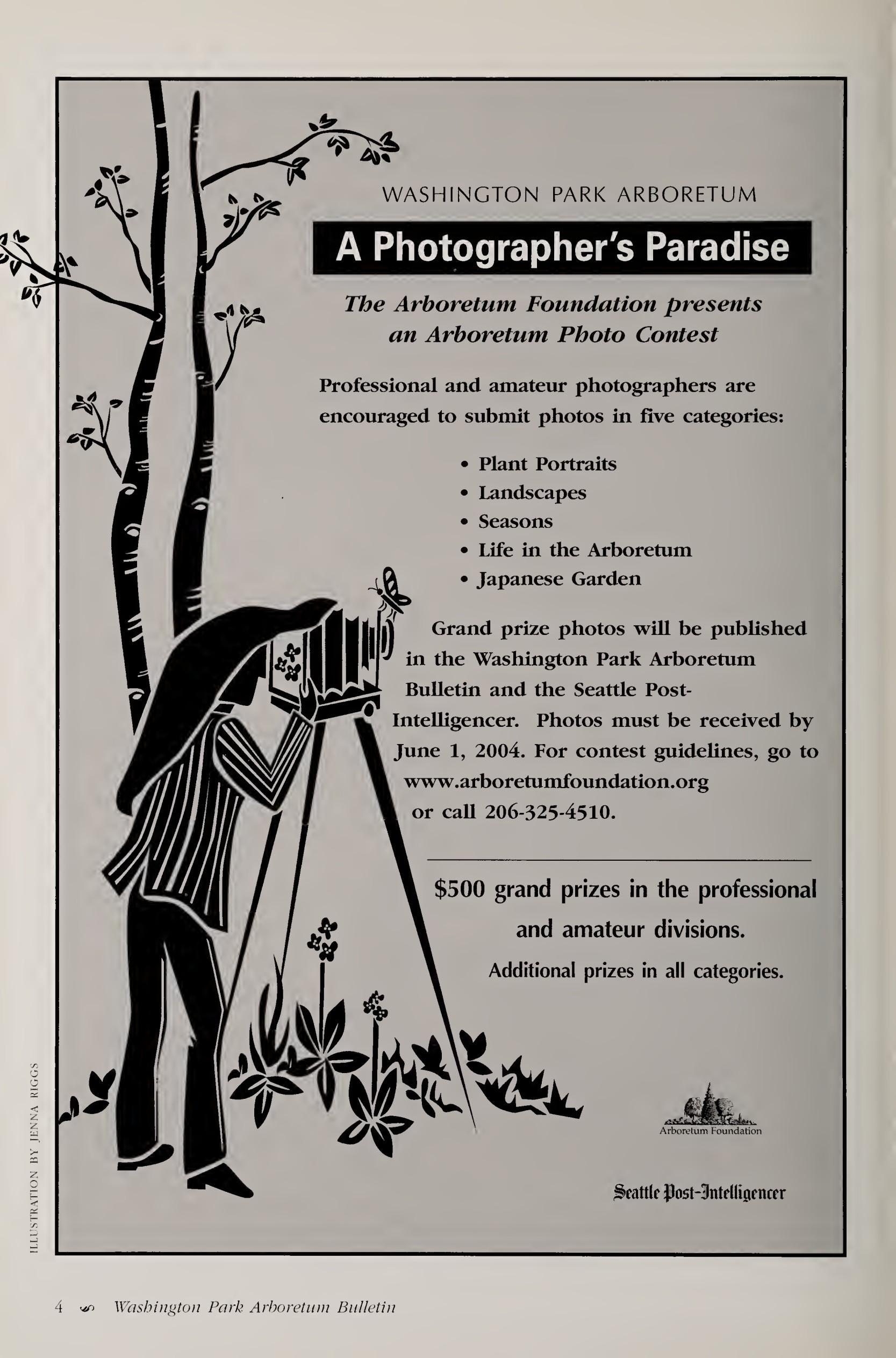
Sunny yellow daffodils, lipstick pink tulips and neon purple 'Blue Diamond' azaleas—colorful spring displays have been deemed gaudy by some, but they remain, for me, a heart-warming sight. Why worry about being tasteful? After a long, dark winter, and with the coming of the spring equinox, it's time to dance.

Yellow—both vivid and cool tones—is a dominant color of the season. Near our front walk is a spring combo in which yellow predominates. It is part design and part happy chance, as many good gardens and garden combinations are. And, to make it even better, it's exceedingly low-maintenance.

"Pac. Coast Iris"

Starring in this show is a cultivar of Pacific Coast iris; its flowers are a rich creamy yellow marked heavily with

This creamy yellow Pacific Coast iris, brushed with purple, provides sophistication for the enthusiasm of poached-egg plant, *Limnanthes douglasii*, also a West Coast native, named in honor of plant hunter David Douglas.



WASHINGTON PARK ARBORETUM

A Photographer's Paradise

*The Arboretum Foundation presents
an Arboretum Photo Contest*

Professional and amateur photographers are encouraged to submit photos in five categories:

- Plant Portraits
- Landscapes
- Seasons
- Life in the Arboretum
- Japanese Garden

Grand prize photos will be published in the Washington Park Arboretum Bulletin and the Seattle Post-Intelligencer. Photos must be received by June 1, 2004. For contest guidelines, go to www.arboretumfoundation.org or call 206-325-4510.

\$500 grand prizes in the professional and amateur divisions.

Additional prizes in all categories.



Seattle Post-Intelligencer

purple and golden yellow. The cultivars of Pacific Coast iris have been hybridized from among the species of iris native to the West Coast, including *Iris douglasiana* and *I. tenax*. There are many named cultivars, but there appear to be just as many unnamed ones, resulting from the fact that the plants hybridize so easily. For this reason, in spring, many nurseries carry plants (in bloom or not) marked only "Pac. Coast iris."

This is in no way a problem. I believe in buying almost any Pacific Coast iris I see, named or not. They combine an irresistible set of cultural requirements: part shade, no summer water, division rarely needed, and after they finish flowering the evergreen grassy foliage continues to look good. I'm sold.

Although the pictured iris is one of those unmarked plants, perhaps its name is known to some Pacific Coast iris enthusiast who has a better grasp than I of the multitude of cultivars available. (It isn't that I never buy one with a name: I acquired a fabulous selection from Colvos Creek Nursery on Vashon Island last year. The iris, which has flowers colored a tawny-apricot, is appropriately named 'Root Beer.')

Best Supporting Actors

Sharing the stage in supporting roles are the poached egg plant (*Limnanthes douglasii*) and the Welsh poppy (*Meconopsis cambrica*); usually, forget-me-nots (*Myosotis sylvatica*) also make an appearance.

Limnanthes douglasii (other common names include fried eggs and meadow foam) is an annual that is native to moist places in California and Oregon. Its preference for dampish places makes it a perfect spring flower, when all the world seems dampish. Once flowering is finished, it sets seed, at which point the plants look rather tatty, and can be yanked out, thus scattering seeds and ensuring more flowers next year. Seeds

usually begin to germinate with autumn rains; plants hold over the winter and bloom in spring.

Meconopsis cambrica blooms both yellow or orange, but seed of the one yellow-flowering plant I bought has only ever produced more yellow flowers. The flower has a crepe paper look, single petals and a cluster of white stamen. Welsh poppies are perennials that reseed readily. After an initial flush of flowers in spring, the plants set seed. They may not be officially summer-dormant, but, if not given regular water through the summer, they fade from prominence until autumn when plants that were not edited out of the garden will flower again once rains begin.

The Welsh poppy seedhead works as those of other poppies do. It contains lots of tiny black seeds that are scattered out through tiny holes when the plant is shaken. Spent flowers can be cut off, leaving a modest clump of greenery; ripping a plant out of the ground once seeds have ripened only invites more poppies into your garden.

The iris and two garden ephemerals are often joined by the ubiquitous forget-me-not (*Myosotis sylvatica*). Creeping cheerily along from bed to bed, these little thugs get their way because it's spring and we're feeling generous. They provide great satisfaction: Once finished blooming (and they are covered in powdery mildew), they are easily pulled from the ground.

Cutting back or pulling out, a late-spring cleaning gives the bed instant transformation from shabby to tidy and makes way for summer. ~

MARTY WINGATE writes widely about gardening and is a member of the Bulletin's editorial board. Her first book, "Big Ideas for Northwest Small Gardens," was published by Sasquatch Books in February 2003.



Gardening in Finland

STORY AND PHOTOS BY STEVE LORTON

The Finns are famous for frugality. It permeates their culture, their design, their approach to life. And they live with an economy of verbiage and visible emotion that is, initially, unsettling to the outsider.

But spend part of a day with even the most taciturn of Finns, and you'll soon hear the Finnish word ***sisu*** followed by an explanation of what the word means. *Sisu* is a complex word, replete with rich associations and cultural references. It is the essence of Finnish dignity. *Sisu* means inner strength, the ability to persevere, to "make it." Yet it is as silent as the forests of Lapland and as icy as the Baltic Sea. *Sisu* is nothing that an outsider can really put a finger on; still it is as basic to Finland as earth and water. And *sisu* figures into the Finns' approach to gardening.

Inner strength and perseverance are bred into the Finns. The weather demands it. History has forced it upon them. The earliest Finns are said to have arrived as much as 9,000 years ago. Yet until 1917, when the indigenous people declared their independence, Finland was either annexed to Sweden or to Russia. The Finns were a distinct people but not a nation. Then, with the Russian Revolution, the Finns saw their chance. They seized it and never looked back. The Finns are proud and patriotic, and their national spirit generates

more heat among them than either their saunas or their vodka.

When Summer Arrives

As high on the globe as Alaska, this magnificent country of just over 5 million people is a bit smaller than the state of Montana. As in Alaska, winters are long and brutal. Saltwater freezes. Snow piles high. Days are short, and the sun creeps low along the horizon for the few hours that it is up. Then summer arrives. And for the roughly 150 days between sometime in May and the end of September, the Finns worship the sun, and they garden.

As a gardener or garden-lover traveling in Finland, you're not there to see grand estates like those of England, France and Western Europe. In fact there is really only one of those—the summer palace of the president in the old capital of Turku. And even Madam President's garden, as stunningly handsome as it is, is modest compared to the likes of Hidcote Manor and Chateau de Villandry. It is noteworthy that Tarja Halonen, the first woman to be elected to the presidency, grows her own tomatoes. She grows them in a greenhouse, just as Alaskans do it, a necessity in the bright but cool Finnish summer climate.

What a gardener does go to Finland to see are the gardens of the people, the places where the human hand has touched, edited,



ABOVE: An altogether friendly-looking scarecrow, which "artfully celebrates the ordinary," adorns an allotment garden on the outskirts of Helsinki.

LEFT: A sunny yellow cottage, at one end of this garden plot in Helsinki's Herttoniemi Allotment Garden, watches over its owner's tidy rows of flowers and vegetables.

and supplemented the grandeur of the natural Finnish landscape. In these pockets of living beauty, *sisu* has been put to the test and triumphed over extremes of climate and the numbing effect of colonial arrogance. The gardening spirit of Finland is manifested in three places: botanical gardens and parks, old fashioned folk gardens, and larger, modern residential gardens.

Public Gardens

Finland's institutionalization of horticulture reaches back into the Swedish period. The first botanical garden was established in Turku in 1678. In the collections, glass houses, and display beds of the country's botanical gardens, one sees the exacting Finnish love of order and the national obsession with discovery, rediscovery and improvement. In the parks and open spaces, filled with annual and perennial displays, grand trees, and liberally dotted with sculpture, one is uplifted by the native design sense and the no-nonsense spirit of egalitarianism that defines Finnish politics.

Both Helsinki and Turku have large and comprehensive botanical gardens, dedicated to both research and education and serving the public in every way from the testing of new plant introductions to established wildlife habitats open to bird watchers. And the daring extremes to which the Finns will go in their pursuit of beauty are evident in Helsinki's Laajasuo Park. In 1975, rhododendrons were planted in a bog under a protective canopy of Scotch pine (*Pinus sylvestris*). Today, astonishingly, huge floriferous hybrids, selected for both beauty and hardiness, cover about 12 1/2 acres. It's a stunning spectacle in June.

Private Celebrations

In the planting boxes that spill from the windows of every little weathered house in every little weathered fishing village, you see

the love of home and the vast Finnish ability to artfully celebrate the ordinary. Not a faded flower or yellowed leaf is to be found, and wood is only painted or stained at the exact moment that patina turns into shabbiness. The same can be said for the cottage gardens that surround heritage houses in towns such as Kotka and the allotment gardens.

The allotment garden system was set up so that families in cities could retreat to a pastoral setting and grow their own produce. Finland's first allotment garden was founded in 1916, at the very end of the Russian era. Today it is easy to visit the Herttoniemi Allotment Garden, established in 1934 on the outskirts of Helsinki. Covering a bit over 18 acres, the area is a grid pattern of individual plots, each about 1,000 square feet. Land is leased by families or individuals from the city at a small price. Each lot may have a small cottage and shed and is surrounded by a hedge—often a fruit or flower-bearing hedge, or a fence that is scramble with flowering vines. Usually a rustic path of mismatched stones leads to the dwelling, flanked by planting beds filled with flowers and edibles.

There are 182 members in the Herttoniemi Association. As you walk into this lush and overgrown pocket of Finland's largest city, birds chirp, you might hear the sound of a shovel or pick, but human sounds are rare. Walk past the gates to the allotments, one by one. Look in. A happy gardener will look up and smile or perhaps even wave.

Thread your way through the narrow roadways and you may come to the garden of Saara Pelttari. A radiantly beautiful woman, Saara is a retired teacher, probably in her late 70s. Her handsomely styled hair is snow white, her large eyes, glacier blue, and her skin, smooth and sparkling as porcelain. She's likely to be wearing a well-tailored, dark blue linen gardening dress, sandals, and a large, broad-brimmed hat. Any of her young friends who design for Marimekko or Arabia are



**"If one
is lucky, one
is born with a
gardener's
heart."**

likely to be setting out an elegant lunch, and you may well be invited to join. Surrounded by flowers and fruit trees with a sky blue cottage, trimmed in white tucked behind, Saara's eyes will dance with enthusiasm and summer sunlight as she tells you, in impeccable English, why she gardens: "I must. It is simple. If one is lucky, one is born with a gardener's heart."

Cultivating the Frivolous

Modern Finland, like the rest of the First World, has caught the gardening bug. In a



van, speeding past the birch and pine forests between Helsinki and Turku, en route to Kauppila Nursery, Rauni Schleutker talks about Finland's role in this nearly global phenomenon. "In the last decade, Finns have been swept into the ornamental gardening craze. In the past we were too busy growing food, potatoes and cabbages. It was considered frivolous," she pauses, "yes, frivolous to cultivate flowers. Now, with our economic success, a robust food supply, and free time, Finns have taken up home gardening with a zeal similar to that in Western Europe, America, Australia, and New Zealand."

LEFT: "The most beautiful garden in all of Finland," a tribute to its creator, Tuija Rytsala, and Finnish *sisu*.

RIGHT: Saara Peltari, prepared to invite garden visitors to share an elegant lunch in her allotment garden.



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At Kauppila Nursery evidence of Rauni's theory abounds. Owner Antti Kauppila, a handsome, fit fellow in his mid-60s, is greeting customers by the dozens as trellises, pots, bags of soil, twine, tools, and potted plants go out the door. Ask Antti where horticulture is going in Finland and he leads you, with naked bias, to his current pet project—roses. He loves the rugosas for all the reasons everyone loves rugosas. He tramped around old farmhouses as far north as Lapland and visited cemeteries to find hardy, handsome, fragrant and colorful naturalized plants. He has a test garden and a display area and touts the virtues of the much-celebrated old Finnish mid-summer rose that he says is a variety of *Rosa pimpinellifolia*. He literally twitches with excitement as he talks about breeding Damask roses with 'Stanwell Perpetual' to come up with large, fragrant, repeat bloomers that are exceptionally hardy.

Sisu

As Finland's love of ornamental gardening has risen, so has the nation's horticultural sophistication. New, grand houses are going up in Finland's countryside, both sleekly contemporary and in classic, Finnish farmhouse style, surrounded by native gardens, or with great sweeps of ferns or grasses. Rarely does one see anything that looks even vaguely English.

But perhaps the most telling garden of all belongs to a farm wife, named Tuija Rytsala, who lives with her family along the south coast. Beautiful, even by Finnish standards, Tuija married, at a young age, the only son of an old farming couple. She moved into the large family home with her parents-in-law and began her family.

With high energy and a light and winning style she worked the farm. But, for whatever reason, she felt strong disapproval from both her mother and father-in-law. She was too happy, too carefree and, perhaps, too

beautiful. Undaunted, she went on. She began to become interested in plants. She added a rose in one spot, a tree or shrub that she had read about in another. The parents, especially her mother-in-law, fussed at her. The old Finnish woman thought her pursuit of flowers was frivolous. Tuija kept going. When the old parents became house-bound, she established beautiful beds where they were unable to look out and see them.

The old man died. The old woman lived on. The garden grew. All the while Tuija took excellent care of the mother-in-law, even loving her, but never gaining the old woman's approval. Then, a few years ago, the Finnish government sponsored a contest in search of the most beautiful garden in all of Finland. Tuija sent in photographs and, to her utter amazement and the wild excitement of her husband, children, and the surrounding community, she won! Tuija had created the most beautiful garden in all of Finland. Newspapers and magazines all published stories on the achievement. Visitors flocked to the garden and the national television station came to film a documentary. Tuija was asked if her mother-in-law would make a few comments. But the old woman refused to come out of the house.

Tuija is philosophical about that part of her life. "My mother-in-law is an old Finnish farm woman. She is strong. She felt I was wasting time and resources and engaged in a kind of silliness. It went against that old Finnish ideal of *sisu*."

But how did Tuija do it in the face of such disapproval? How could she carry on? "I was never bitter. I just knew what I was going to do. I had to do it. So I did it. I just put in one plant at a time and kept going."

And that, of course, is *sisu* as well. ☾

STEVE LORTON is NW Bureau Chief of *Sunset* magazine and a member of the editorial board of the Bulletin.

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Benefits Washington Park Arboretum

THE RHODODENDRON SPECIES BOTANICAL GARDEN: Celebrating Its 40th Birthday!

BY RICK PETERSON

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RSBG



LEFT: *Rhododendron nakaharai* 'Mt. Seven Star' is a dwarf, evergreen azalea with intense orange-red flowers and dark green, shiny foliage.



RIGHT: *Rhododendron huteum* 'Golden Comet,' the first species selection made at the RSBG, dazzles the eye in April, as its heavenly scent wafts through the air. This glowing beauty will be available at the RSBG spring plant sale.

When I began working at the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden (RSBG) in 1985, I was utterly amazed, as most new visitors are, at the variety of rhododendrons found in the wild. Some are prostrate groundcovers growing no more than a few inches high, while others reach more than 100 feet. They have an extraordinary range of leaf size, shape and texture and many different types of flowers from bell-shaped to tubular.

There are almost 1,000 species in the genus *Rhododendron*, native to temperate regions of North America, Europe, and Asia, as well as tropical regions of Southeast Asia and northern Australia. None are indigenous to Africa or



South America. They are found from sea level to 19,000 feet in elevation, where they occur in a variety of habitats, including alpine regions, coniferous and broad-leaved woodlands, temperate rain forests, and even the tropics—indeed, about one-third of the genus is native to tropical and subtropical regions.

This diversity of climates has shaped a wide range of sizes and forms in this enormous group of plants. The leaves of species rhododendrons vary from less than $\frac{1}{4}$ inch to over 2 and $\frac{1}{2}$ feet long, and there are dozens of leaf types, including very rounded, lance-shaped, and elliptical; some are covered with colorful tiny hairs that give them a fuzzy texture, and they grow in shades

of green from emerald to olive to forest—even metallic blue-green! In early January these wild beauties begin to bloom in the Pacific Northwest, with most in bloom in late April and the last to bloom toward the end of July. As spring days are warmed by the sun, rhododendron flowers burst forth in shades of pure white to soft pink, clear yellow, brilliant red, and deep violet.

The Garden's Beginnings

The famous plant explorations of China and the Himalaya Mountains by Western botanists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries led to the introduction of hundreds of new species rhododendrons. Most of the

A view of the RSBG alpine area where 200 tons of granite from nearby Cascade mountains create the impression of a Himalayan slope where tiny-leaved rhododendrons cling precariously against wind and snow.



ROLLO ADAMS

seed collections originally went to England. By the mid-20th century, hybrid rhododendrons were becoming very popular in the United States, and not too long after that, species became of interest to a handful of American gardeners.

Forty years ago a small group of *Rhododendron* species enthusiasts formed the Rhododendron Species Foundation with a mission to collect, propagate, and distribute authenticated *Rhododendron* species and the finest forms of this large genus. For Dr. Milton Walker, who was a driving force of the group, public education and research were also vital goals of the Foundation, as they continue to be today. With the destruction of *Rhododendron* habitats around the world, conservation has become a primary objective as well.

A Notable Collection

As the 40th anniversary of the Foundation's formation begins this year, a look back to the achievements of those involved over its first four decades is in order. Foremost among the Foundation's achievements is the *Rhododendron* species collection. The Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden has acquired one of the most diverse and complete collections of *Rhododendron* species in the world. Beginning with a modest assortment of 79 species in 1964, the collection has grown



STEVE HOUTMAN

Rhododendron obiculare offers unusual, bright green rounded leaves and pale pink to rose, bell-shaped flowers on a 10-foot shrub.

(Arboretum grids 15-3E.)

to 488 including 72 tropical species. These are represented by over 4,500 accessions.

The original collection was initially maintained in the personal garden of Milton Walker, who lived in Eugene, Oregon. In 1974 the Weyerhaeuser Company generously leased to the Foundation, at no cost, a permanent site for the garden at its corporate headquarters in Federal Way, Washington. Since that time the site has matured into a display of over 10,000 rhododendrons growing in a beautiful woodland setting covering 22 acres. The species are arranged taxonomically, i.e., those species most closely related are planted near one another. Complementing the rhododendrons are numerous companion plantings of ferns, primroses, iris, heathers, maples, magnolias, conifers, and many other exotic and unusual plants. The garden area was officially named the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden in 1993.

Visit The Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden

- **March–May, 10 A.M. to 4 P.M.**
(closed Thursdays)
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information, call 253-838-4646.**

Seven Months of Bloom!

The flowering season typically begins in mid-winter with *Rhododendron dauricum*, hailing from the cold regions of eastern Siberia. With an abundance of bright red-purple flowers, the plants in the Garden practically glow on a gray winter day. In February the reds of *R. strigillosum* and *R. barbatum* radiate

near a small pond and, just up the hill, *R. faurium* displays handsome magenta flowers. Near the lawn, at the center of the Garden, *R. sutchuenense* and *R. principis* are resplendent with pastel pink bouquets.

April to early May is generally the time when visitors see the most in bloom. *Rhododendron augustinii* is a perennial favorite for its masses of deep lavender flowers on tall stately plants, while *R. orbiculare* is a showstopper for its bell-shaped, light to deep rose-colored blossoms and very rounded foliage. One species that has become more well-known to the general gardening public in recent years is *R. degronianum* ssp. *yakushimanum*, which is native to one small island in the Japanese archipelago. About Mother's Day the "yaks," as they are commonly called, are at peak bloom near the Garden gazebo—their apple-blossom flower buds opening to a pristine white.

Later in May and into early June, azaleas, which are botanically included in the genus *Rhododendron*, bloom in bright colors, and several perfume the air with wonderful fragrance. A fine example is *Rhododendron luteum* 'Golden Comet,' which blooms earlier than most of the others, with deep yellow flowers and a heady scent.

In early summer the flowering season concludes with *Rhododendron nakaharai*, a dwarf, evergreen azalea from Taiwan with brick-red flowers; *R. maximum*, a species from the eastern United States and Canada with white-flushed pink flowers; and *R. auriculatum*, a Chinese species with large white flowers and a spicy fragrance. All these and much more grow beneath tall Douglas fir, western red cedar, and hemlock.

New Introductions

Discovery of new species and reintroduction of species has come to the forefront in recent years as the RSBG has participated in or led seven botanical expeditions to eastern Asia. The Garden has been among the first to offer new species collected by its staff as well

as other plant explorers. A few examples of these introductions are *Rhododendron gongshanense*, *lateriflorum*, *leptocladon*, *longipes*, *luciferum*, *mallotum*, *monanthum*, *neoglandulosum*, *ocbraceum*, *serotinum*, and *sinofalconeri*. In addition, wild-collected specimens of species formerly represented only by garden-origin plants have been added to the collection, making this an important *ex situ* (outside of the wild) repository for the world's *Rhododendron* gene pool.

The RSBG has made great strides over its first four decades—from an inkling in the minds of those who were passionate about true species rhododendrons to a full-fledged botanical garden with an international reputation. ♦

RICK PETERSON is Co-Executive Director & Garden Manager of the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden, where he has worked for 19 years.

Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden

www.rhodygarden.org

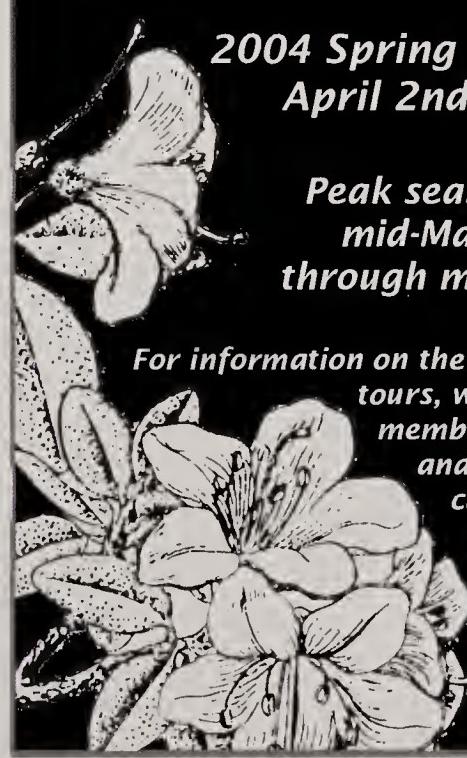
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Richie's Species Primer

BY RICHIE STEFFEN

*W*hen one's passion for species rhododendrons outstrips one's garden space, regular trips to Washington Park Arboretum and the Rhododendron

Species Botanical Garden are required therapy. But if I could plant a new, personal-favorites rhododendron garden right this minute, these are the ten selections I would make . . .



RICHIE STEFFEN
PHOTO COURTESY OF RSBG



Both its new leaf shoots covered in red bristles and its red February bloom draw gardeners to *Rhododendron strigillosum*. It is hard to imagine a more alluring, winter-blooming plant.
(Arboretum grid location 34-1E.)



TOP: With new, felted foliage to please every coffee-lover, *Rhododendron pachysanthum* is a stunner; if you care, its flowers are white and bell-shaped, with dense, crimson spots.

BOTTOM: The firecracker rhododendron, *R. spinuliferum*, will, without doubt, give your rhododendron collection a burst of surprise!





"As close to perfect as you can get," *Rhododendron degronianum* ssp. *yakushimanum*, with shiny leaves and pink flowers, is much used in hybridizing. (Arboretum grid location 13-4E.)

- *Rhododendron augustinii*—The "blue" flowered rhododendron everyone needs in the garden. It has a delicate, upright, airy habit with intense lavender blue flowers.
- *Rhododendron degronianum* ssp. *yakushimanum*—As close to perfect as you can get, great flowers blooming as a young plant,

compact growth and striking indumented (fuzzy), white new growth.

- *Rhododendron keiskei* 'Yaku Fairy'—Native to alpine regions of Japan, it will take decades to reach 12 inches tall. Compact, tight growth dotted with small, primrose yellow blooms. A choice and easy-to-grow dwarf.
- *Rhododendron luteum* 'Golden Comet'—The Rhododendron Species Foundation's selection of a wonderful deciduous azalea. Graced with very fragrant, golden yellow flowers in late April and brilliant scarlet fall color until late November. Very resistant to powdery mildew.
- *Rhododendron nakaharai* 'Mt. Seven Star'—An uncommon groundcover azalea. Low-growing with deep evergreen leaves, these spreading mounds are covered with brick red flowers in late June and early July.

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Rhododendron neriflorum ‘Rosevallon’—Everyone who sees it must have it. It has bright red flowers and rich burgundy undersides to the leaves. Be forewarned! It is a fussy rhododendron, almost impossible to find, that is considered a delicacy by root weevils.

Rhododendron pachysanthum—The Cadillac of rhododendrons for its foliage. With true Seattle flare, foliage emerges mocha, progresses to cocoa, then mellows to the color of a cappuccino’s froth. Who cares if it ever blooms!

- *Rhododendron rex*—Large leaves, spectacular new growth, ten years until you see the first flowers. That is all you need to know to grow the most easy and reliable big-leaf rhody.
- *Rhododendron spinuliferum*—Although it can grow with a somewhat random habit, the flowers are quite un-rhododendron like.

Commonly called the firecracker rhododendron—don’t carry a bouquet of these through airport security!

- *Rhododendron strigillosum*—Loved for its rich red flowers in February. The new leaves emerge on stems covered in pink and red hairs. I have three plants already and may have to buy another!

If you, too, find some of these plants irresistible, inquire about their availability at the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden plant sale on Saturday April 3. ☺

RICHIE STEFFEN is passionate about rhododendrons! He worked at the Rhododendron Species Foundation & Botanical Garden prior to becoming Coordinator of Horticulture for the Elisabeth C. Miller Botanical Garden in Seattle.



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Modern-Day Plant-Hunting in the



During my tenure as Curator of the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden, I have been privileged to undertake numerous plant-hunting expeditions to the far reaches of eastern Asia. Among the interesting places I have visited, such exotic regions as Tibet, Sikkim, the mountains

of southwestern China and the states of Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh in the Indian Himalaya stand out as highlights.

Most of these expeditions have been into areas little known or even unexplored by previous plant hunters. Because of this and the floristically rich nature of these localities, there is great opportu-

**STORY AND PHOTOS
BY STEVE HOOTMAN**

ABOVE: The rich forests of the Dulong Valley in northwest Yunnan, China, near the borders with Burma and Tibet.

INSETS: The brilliant blue berries of the rare, creeping, evergreen shrub, *Gaultheria sinensis*, at 12,600 feet on the Dulong Pass in northwest Yunnan, China, as well as the bright red berries of *Viburnum betulifolium* (SEH#070) found in the Daliang Shan, Sichuan, China.

Sino-Himalaya



nity to find species new to cultivation and occasionally, even to science. The goals of these expeditions have been to search for interesting plants and to expand our knowledge of the geography and the isolated people inhabiting these remote regions.

The life and work of a modern-day plant hunter are very different from the experiences of those brave and intrepid souls who first forged their way into the unknown regions of the Far East in the late 19th and early 20th



centuries. Legendary men, such as Ernest Wilson, George Forrest, Frank Kingdon Ward and Joseph Rock, pioneered the exploration of this area. They had to contend with war, poor equipment and food, hostile natives and long, lonely sojourns in the field, sometimes being away from home for months or even years at a time. Just the initial journey to Asia and subsequent travel into the frontier could take months. The results of their exploits are visible even today in the hundreds of now familiar and even commonplace plants in our gardens.

In the modern era, we can take a flight to almost anywhere in the world and can be in the field within a matter of days. Four-wheel drive vehicles take us into the mountains for a quick look around before we fly home again a few weeks later. (Of course, we are talking *relative* ease here; it is not really as easy as I am making it out to be.)

Meeting Native Peoples

One of the most interesting aspects of my travels is the amazing diversity of people encountered as one penetrates deeper into the

ABOVE RIGHT: A young Tibetan guide with the striking high-altitude *Rheum nobile* at 14,000 feet in the Tsari Valley, southeast Tibet.

"bush." Various ethnic minorities inhabit the mountains and jungles of the Sino-Himalaya, each with a distinct language and culture. It is the members of these groups that guide us and keep us alive in the remote regions far from our own "civilization" with its emergency rescue and medical aid. It is still possible, in a few remote areas, to see the local native people in their traditional dress, living much as they have lived for hundreds of years. Often, in those areas more frequented by tourists, one can see native costumes, dancing, etc., but this display is typically only put on for tourists.

For example, in 2001, I led an expedition to the Dulong Jiang (Taron River) in extreme northwestern Yunnan Province, China. This area had not been visited by foreigners since the early part of the last century. The people in the valley are primarily members of the native Dulong or Drung minority, a group of only about 3,000 people of very short stature and timid demeanor who have been persecuted for centuries by the Tibetan and Burmese people living in the adjacent mountains.

Early one afternoon we reached a small village where a game of basketball was well underway. Needless to say, we were quite surprised, even more so when we were told that day was one of the major celebrations of the year and were invited to the party—a grand display of local dancing, singing and music. We were incredibly lucky to have arrived at such a propitious moment in the year. The celebration went well into the evening and once most of the native dancing, singing and playing of instruments had finished, our expedition group was asked to perform something from our own country.

Just two weeks earlier, we had barely managed to leave the United States only days after the September 11 attacks. It was a strange feeling to be so isolated and ignorant of what was happening back home. (There are no "internet cafes" in the Dulong Valley.) With the help of a continual supply of local brew, the six of us stood before the crowd of hundreds

and performed a rousing edition of "America the Beautiful." We received a standing ovation.

New Plant Species

Of course, such an expedition is not all fun and games. One of the most exciting aspects for me personally is the anticipation of knowing that just around the corner may be an unknown plant, even a new species. For example, over two dozen rhododendrons have been introduced into cultivation over the past several years. While these new introductions are all extremely interesting to the collector or aficionado, several should also prove to be good all-around garden plants for the Pacific Northwest.

A few that I am particularly impressed with include the following species: *Rhododendron ochraceum* from southern Sichuan and adjacent northeastern Yunnan, with balls of bright red flowers above lanceolate foliage; *R. sinofalconeri*, from the southern Yunnan/northern Vietnam border region, a hardy big-leaf species with large inflorescences of pale yellow flowers; an as yet unnamed new species in subsection Maddenia, a large group of mostly leggy and sprawling epiphytes with exuberant, often fragrant, lily-like flowers. Unlike the other members of this subsection, this new species, with white-flushed pink, funnel-shaped flowers, possesses a dwarf and quite compact habit, a real treasure in the garden and sure to be a boon to hybridizers; another fantastic new garden plant is *Rhododendron glanduliferum*, a rare species from northeastern Yunnan with large foliage and fragrant white flowers in mid-summer. The bright purple-red new growth of this species emerges extremely late in the season (late July to August), providing another season of spectacular color.

These four rhododendrons were all collected in 1995 on my first expedition. Much of that trip took place in the territory of the Yi people, a minority group in China with a large population spread over several provinces.

The Yi have a reputation for ferociousness, and the Han (Mandarin speaking) Chinese are often rather hesitant to go into the mountains they inhabit. My most memorable experience with the Yi took place while camping at 11,500 feet in the Daliang Shan of southern Sichuan. I was awakened throughout the night by a loud scratching on the outside of my tent. Every time I opened my tent to have a look, I would hear nothing but the strong cold wind piercing the incredible darkness. Eventually I found sleep, and it was only in the early morning that I realized what had happened during the night. Members of the local Yi villages had sneaked into our camp and stolen numerous items including a pair of boots. Fortunately, my tent is a one-piece (vs. a fly with a ground cloth as was used by my British compatriots), so I lost nothing other than sleep.

The following morning we hastily packed up under the watchful eyes of two dozen Yi men sitting on their haunches, encircling our camp. A few miles down the road we stopped for breakfast, and I found a most amazing shrub with masses of red "berries." I recognized it as *Viburnum betulifolium*, a widespread Chinese species exhibiting great variation and known for its spectacular display of fruit.

Other Ericaceous Plants

As a "rhododendron expert" I am, of course, always on the lookout for exciting new forms and species of this vast and incredible genus containing almost 1,000 wild species. Of equal or even greater interest to me personally is a group relatively overlooked by gardeners and other explorers—other members of the heath and rhododendron family, the Ericaceae. Although there are a great many ericaceous



Interested spectators gawk at curious Western eating habits outside a small restaurant in a remote village in southern Sichuan province, China.

plants in our gardens—for example, the genera *Erica*, *Calluna*, *Pieris*, *Gaultheria*, *Vaccinium*, and *Arbutus* are all rhododendron relatives; the vast majority of species in this large and highly ornamental family are rarely if ever grown in gardens.

I have always had a lust for dwarf evergreen shrubs, and the genera

Gaultheria and *Vaccinium* have these in abundance. The creeping and shrubby wintergreens (*Gaultheria* species) are variable and widespread in the Himalaya and adjacent Chinese mountains. Most species exhibit great evergreen foliage with pink or white bell-shaped flowers in small clusters. These flowers are followed by some of the finest displays of fruit in the plant kingdom, with shades of blue, lavender and turquoise calling forth from the forest margins and alpine slopes inhabited by these underused beauties.

Many Asian members of the vast genus *Vaccinium* (blueberries, huckleberries, cranberries and lingonberries) are native to habitats and regions too low in elevation to perform reliably in our climate. Fortunately, there are several extremely ornamental blueberries that are proving to be excellent subjects for the woodland or rock garden. Chief among these are *Vaccinium delavayi*, *V. glaucoalbum* and *V. nummularia*. These evergreen species are already well established in cultivation, though hard to find, and recent new collections from high elevations should provide the added hardiness to include these beautiful dwarf shrubs on the "must have" list of every gardener.

Another species, *Vaccinium sikkimense*, is extremely rare in cultivation but has been

continues on page 33

MEERKERK RHODODENDRON GARDENS:

Contemporary Rhododendron Hybrids & Their Hybridizers

STORY AND PHOTOS BY KRISTI O'DONNELL

*I*t is the tenth of April, a sunny day abuzz with bees and people pollinating rhododendrons. The Meerkerk Hybrid Test Garden is a rainbow of blossoms whose pot of gold is made of gilded anthers. One time only a dream, the circular labyrinth is now alive with color!

Ann and Max Meerkerk, the Gardens' founders, arrived on Whidbey Island over 40 years ago, very involved with breeding of a different sort. Max was the president of the international Weimaraner association and was responsible for bringing this dog breed's true bloodline from Germany to the United States.



BACKGROUND PHOTO: BILL HELLER

Upon visiting a friend on Whidbey, the Meerkerks became enchanted with the island and purchased an initial thirteen acres of forested land. With 88 canines in tow, they moved to Whidbey Island to engage in the final stage of their life journey.

Inspired by stands of native *Rhododendron macrophyllum* and Max's fondness of the Rothschild's Exbury Estate, they began work on their Pacific Northwest woodland-style garden.

Soon, the infectious lure of rhododendrons overtook the Meerkerks. They collected plant specimens from England and Asia and became best customers of the "RumDum Club" of Northwest hybridizers. (See the Bulletin, Spring 2001.) As an active member of the Washington Park Arboretum, Ann modeled the original Meerkerk "secret garden" on the Arboretum's collections. A landscape rich with intermediate deciduous trees and ground-covers emerged to accompany their newfound passion, rhododendrons.

The Meerkerks soon became rhododendron hybridizers themselves. Halfdan Lem's breakthrough 'Lem's Cameo' led to the Meerkerk hybrid 'Mary's Favorite.' Max's love of the velvety underside of the leaves, the indumentum, inspired the creation of the *Rhododendron bureavii* cross, 'Meerkerk Magic.' The intrigue of tree-form rhododendrons with deeply pigmented blooms, such as *R. niveum*, resulted in the arboreal hybrid 'Whidbey Island.'

A Lasting Bequest

Before Ann passed away in 1979, she willed that the gardens become a site for continuing the work she and Max had begun. Bequeathing the gardens to the Seattle Rhododendron Society she stated:

"I have envisioned for the future, a careful and methodical development of a peaceful woodland garden emphasizing rhododen-

LEFT INSETS: At the entrance to the Hybrid Test Garden, the soft yellow flowers of *Rhododendron 'Golden Genie'*, developed by the late Bruce Briggs and Gene Brady, beckon. Nevertheless, commercial growers are still looking for a hardy yellow rhody with good form. *Rhododendron 'Mary's Favorite'*, hybridized by the Meerkerks, is a dwarf tree-form plant, unique for its fragrance and peachy, lily-like florets.

BACKGROUND: The April blossoms of *Rhododendron 'Whidbey Island'* grace an arboreal-form rhododendron that develops a stout trunk and a 20- to 25-foot canopy; it was hybridized by the Meerkerks and registered by former Meerkerk Gardens manager Bill Stipe.

MEERKERK RHODODENDRON GARDENS

*M*eerkerk Gardens was established by Ann and Max Meerkerk in the 1960s and bequeathed to the Seattle Rhododendron Society (SRS) in 1979. The Gardens were developed by the SRS from 1979 to 2003. Today, Meerkerk Rhododendron Gardens is an independent, not-for-profit, private garden open to the public.

In addition to the Hybrid Test Garden, Meerkerk showcases species rhododendrons in the Asian Garden. The Big Leaf Valley features exotic tree-form rhododendrons in a verdant woodland. The Ramsey Rock Garden highlights dwarf rhododendrons and companion plants. More than 100,000 spring flowering bulbs were planted over the past decade, making the prelude to peak rhododendron season vibrant and welcome after the gray skies of winter. A forty-three-acre forest preserve with nature trails envelops the Gardens, protecting the serene habitat. ☙

drons and companion plants. In addition to being of great ornamental value, I would anticipate that the garden would be used to test, select and propagate superior plant materials."

—ANN WRIGHT MEERKERK, 1979

Organization of the Meerkerk Rhododendron Gardens ensued. Through the dedicated work of volunteers and hybridizers from the far reaches of the globe, a new test garden was conceived. Hybrids from Hans Hachmann of Germany, Jack Lofthouse of Canada, Marjatta Uosukainen of Finland and Hideo Suzuki of Japan are among those from the 10 nations represented. Hybrid crosses

from the gardens of Warren Berg, Frank Fujioka, Joe Davis, Harold Greer, Jim Barlup, Elsie Watson, Jasmin Workman, Britt Smith, Edna and Lloyd Newcomb, Bill Stipe, Ted Van Veen, Clint Smith, David Leach, and Ned Brockenbrough represent the dozens of participating hybridizers from the United States.

The early work of the "RumDum Club" influenced the hybridizers of the middle era, including the Meerkers. (See the Bulletin, Spring 2001 & Spring 2002). Elsie Watson, the founder of the Northwest Hybridizers Group, actively participates in hybridizing and in Meerkerk's monthly work parties. (Elsie celebrated her 90th birthday in 2003!) Her extensive work searching for the most azure

MEERKERK RHODODENDRON GARDENS 25TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

2004 marks the 25th anniversary of the Meerkerk Rhododendron Gardens opening to the public. To celebrate this silver anniversary, many special events are planned.

Meerkerk Gardens' Springtime Magic
Peak Bloom Season—April through mid-May
Open daily 9 A.M. to 4 P.M.

*T*he Gardens enter peak blooming season in April, with the exact dates set by Mother Nature. The crescendo of rhododendron bloom begins in late April and continues through mid-May. Late-blooming rhododendrons and summer perennial borders brighten the Gardens, mid-May through September.

The April Arbor Day Rhododendron Sale, on Saturday, April 17, celebrates Arbor Day by offering unusual "tree form" rhododendrons. The Purple Passion Rhody Sale on Saturday, May 15, features rhodies in every shade from red-violet to black-purple. Visitors wearing purple receive a complimentary, purple companion plant. The Whidbey Island Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society will hold its flower show at Meerkerk on May 15 as well.

Meerkerk Rhododendron Gardens is located on Whidbey Island, south of Greenbank, Washington, off state highway 525. Detailed directions are available by telephone or on the Meerkerk Gardens Web site.

Meerkerk Gardens is open daily, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. General admission is \$5 per adult. Children under 12 are admitted free when accompanied by an adult.

To contact Meerkerk Rhododendron Gardens, call 360-678-1912 or email meerkerk@whidbey.net. The Gardens' web address is www.meerkergardens.org.



Elsie Watson stands amid her rhododendron hybrids featuring her newest introduction, *R. 'Richard Cree'*, named for her son-in-law.

of the violet rhododendrons resulted in 'Blue Boy.' Watson's goals also encompass early-blooming plants, such as the winter-blooming 'Tabitha,' and those with picotee flowers, such as 'Marley Hedges.' Exotic foliage from big-leaf parentage has gifted the plant world with 'Pink Prelude' and 'Chief Sealth.'

Frank Fujioka

Watson's work influences many contemporary hybridizers. World-respected plantsman Frank Fujioka named his compact, picotee-flowering rhododendron, 'Elsie Watson,' in her honor. For many years, Fujioka visited the Lem Nursery, witnessing the Meerkerks' transporting dozens of fine specimens from mainland to island. Perhaps seeing Lem's work and production of new introductions inspired Fujioka to pursue the world of plant parenthood.

Now 36 years into this art and science, his creations are available to the public. Fujioka registers a plant only after decades of trials at his rhododendron farm on Whidbey Island, with other growers and at the Meerkerk Hybrid Test Garden. He strives to create a plant that has

Briggs Nursery's 2004 Plant of the Year *Rhododendron 'Capistrano'*



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excellent growth habit, great foliage, clear colors, and a long bloom time. His floral alchemy combines these traits to produce plants that flower at a young age.

Fujioka's current series of rhododendrons exhibit lily-like florets with a fine-art appeal, incorporating the "negative space" around flowers, showcasing the blossoms' unique qualities. 'Starbright Champagne'—one of the first of this group of *R. yakushimanum* 'Seaview Sunset' and 'Lem's Cameo' crosses—covers itself with a multitude of shimmering ivory/apricot trusses each April. New foliage emerges in a rich bronze tone and transforms into a shiny emerald canopy on a well-mannered shrub. 'Glowing Gold,' a plant so floriferous that the foliage is occluded, is not only brilliant but sun-tolerant as well.

Elusive Yellow

Rhododendron hybridizers have been in search of the 'pot of gold': a hardy, clear yellow rhododendron, since Rothschild's early 'Crest' and 'Fortune' creations in the early 1900s. Contemporary results can be viewed in the Meerkerk Hybrid Test Garden, which

showcases mature rhododendrons packed with buds. Glimpsing the array of yellows from the crosses of dozens of growers, it is evident they are still panning for the successful nugget.

Best yellow hybrids for the Pacific Northwest include: 'Nancy Evans' and 'Horizon Monarch' from Dr. Ned Brockenbrough; 'Mindy's Love' and 'Invitation' from Jim Barlup; 'Glowing Gold' from Frank Fujioka, and 'Lemon Dream' from Briggs/McCulloch. Leach's 'Capistrano,' introduced through Briggs Nursery, is an H-1 plant, hardy to USDA zone 5. This is great news for gardeners east of the Cascade mountains. Those of us in the horticultural Mecca of the Pacific Northwest are fortunate to have a kaleidoscopic palette of rhododendrons to paint with.

While many hybridizers are in search of the elusive yellow, others are attempting to broaden the color range and hardiness for East Coast landscapes. Introduced to the world of color through photography and to rhododendrons through Wells Medina Nursery, hybridizer Jim Barlup has been working toward obtaining a clear orange rhododendron that is hardy and has great foliage and form.

VISIT THE ARBORETUM'S PUGET SOUND RHODODENDRON HYBRID GARDEN

BY RANDALL HITCHIN

In addition to visiting Whidbey Island's Meerkerk Gardens, rhododendron enthusiasts may view the results of several generations of rhododendron hybridizing at the Arboretum's Puget Sound Rhododendron Hybrid Garden, located near the south end of Azalea Way. Growing there are the following cultivars mentioned in Kristi O'Donnell's article:

- *Rhododendron* 'Whidbey Island'
- *Rhododendron* 'Blue Boy'
- *Rhododendron* 'Pink Prelude'
- *Rhododendron* 'Starbright Champagne'
- *Rhododendron* 'Lem's Cameo'
- *Rhododendron* 'Marley Hedges'
- *Rhododendron* 'Elsie Watson'
- *Rhododendron* 'Nancy Evans'

RANDALL HITCHIN is the registrar and collections manager for Washington Park Arboretum.

Barlup works with growers around the world discussing hardiness and color characteristics and sharing pollen. Last year when visiting his trial garden, I was surprised to see only one flower in bloom: an orange rose. Yes, a rose! Whether he is utilizing creative visualization or a new process of orange-through-osmosis, his goal of obtaining clear orange blossoms on a shrub with good growing habits is a good bet. Looking at his successes, you can see the progress from yellow to orange: 'Mindy's Love,' 'Invitation,' 'Honey Butter,' 'Recital.' By combining his hybrids with others, such as 'Lem's Tangerine,' 'Hill's Low Red' and 'Apricot Fantasy,' the goal of obtaining an orange hybrid is in sight. Jim's named and unnamed hybrids are primary elements of the Meerkerk hybrid test program.

The Next Generation:

"Things are only impossible until they're not."

—JEAN-LUC PICARD

STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION

Hybridizers have not only been creating new flora, they are inspiring a new generation of growers. In 1993, I came to Meerkerk Gardens as Garden Manager. When garden intern Oriana Simmons-Otness began working at Meerkerk in 1998, opportunities blossomed. The effervescence of youth and enthusiasm for plants intrigued our contemporary hybridizers. The combination of sage wisdom, scientific techniques and whimsy shared among Fujioka, Barlup, Watson, Gene Pflug, the Newcombs, Simmon-Otness and me represent the modern era of Meerkerk hybridizers: the Next Generation.

Current seedlings from crosses made in 2003 have germinated and are being grown on in hopes of transplanting some of the qualities of the parent plants. Combining pollen from yellow, indumented *R. wasonii*, Barlup's 'Invitation' and Fujioka's 'Glowing Gold' may

introduce a compact, yellow-flowering rhody with bronze indumentum. Watson's 'Fragrant Red' onto 'Black Prince' may produce a dark maroon, perfumed flower. Plant characteristics in the Meerkerk hybrid program include yellow, deep purple or burgundy flowers with indumentum and striking foliage, disease resistance, good form and fragrance.

Thanks to a generous grant for the Hybrid Test Garden from the American Rhododendron Society, Meerkerk is able to upgrade the test garden via standardized soil testing, improved labeling and signage, database construction and field research.

In 2003, the Great Plant Picks team from the Elisabeth C. Miller Botanical Garden invited me to chair the rhododendron committee. The rhododendron team will be selecting plants over the next several years, focusing on flower color, foliage quality, woodland and arboreal types and those best suited to rock garden companions. Winners in these categories will be tried and true—with a focus on new hybrids and species as they are tested and become available.

With these factors in alignment: mentors and students, plants and pollen, equipment and imagination, we are ushering in the 'Next Generation.'

"I have envisioned for the future... a peaceful woodland garden emphasizing rhododendrons and companion plants."

—ANN WRIGHT MEERKERK, 1979 ~

KRISTI O'DONNELL has served as Manager of the Meerkerk Rhododendron Gardens since 1993 and was appointed Executive Director in 2003. This article is the third and final article in a series about Northwest rhododendron hybridizers and their work. For further information, read "The Pacific Coast Rhododendron Story: The Hybridizers, Collectors and Gardens" by Sonja Nelson and the Portland Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society.



SPECIES RHODODENDRONS: Science & Art Combined

BY BRIAN THOMPSON

Books on plant taxonomy are rarely best sellers. Botanical art, on the other hand, easily finds a market. Pat Halliday recognized this when she wrote "The Illustrated Rhododendron: Their classification portrayed through the artwork of Curtis's Botanical Magazine," which successfully combines science and art to present an appealing introduction to the world of species rhododendrons.

For the lover of fine art work, or for impressing those gathered around the coffee table, this book



The elegant April bloom of *Rhododendron irroratum*, which forms a large shrub or small tree, may be viewed in the Arboretum at grid coordinates 22-B, 24-1E and in the Japanese Garden.

will do handsomely. Meanwhile, gardeners will learn there is much more to rhodies than 'The Honourable Jean Marie de Montague.' And the serious student of rhododendrons will revel in the systematic layout and examples chosen from every sub-genus, section and sub-section of this large genus.

Halliday worked for over 40 years in the herbarium at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, near London, much of that time concentrated on the genus *Rhododendron*. While this gave her both the

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technical knowledge and the artistic skills to illustrate a review, she wisely chose, instead, to draw on one of the most respected and historical sources of botanical art, Curtis's Botanical Magazine.

Curtis's, also known by intimates as Bot. Mag., has, since 1787, provided a platform for leading edge research and exploration in botany by using some of the finest artists of the time to display new discoveries. Other issues have given a systematic presentation of an important plant group. For whatever purpose, an outstanding collection of botanical art has been created and collected.

Of the over 11,000 plates published to date, many of the original watercolors are owned by Kew. The author selected from the over 300 that feature rhododendrons to portray representatives from each of the taxonomic divisions of the genus. Still, with over 850 species, this left some gaps. To fill these, she either commissioned current Curtis artists or, for the few obscure tropical sections for which living examples were not easily available, she herself made line drawings from herbarium specimens.

Only for the Coffee Table?

So what is this? A pretty picture book? Yes, Halliday unabashedly claims in her introduction, that is the primary result of her efforts. But I think she underestimates the educational value of presenting the breadth of a genus that most of us are only familiar with through the many garden hybrids.

Claiming it to be primarily a picture book also undervalues the text the author provided. Each plate includes a detailed description, distribution and habitat information, plus a verbal roadmap to the subject's position in the taxonomic hierarchy.

Of more general interest is the history of discovery and dispersal within the horticultural community of each subject, and its value and cultural needs as a garden feature. For example, she observes that our own

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